Defining Agritourism: A Framework for Understanding High and Low Impact Activities

While not a legal definition, this framework distinguishes between high and low impact agritourism to provide structure for communities, farmers and policymakers to discuss and guide conversations with a shared language.

Low Impact Agritourism

Low Impact Agritourism refers to small-scale, locally integrated agritourism activities that respect and preserve the agricultural, rural, or peri-urban character of a region.

These activities are community-based in that they align with and benefit the local community its farms, residents, and resources through practices such as local sourcing, partnerships with nearby producers, and sensitivity to local land use and environmental considerations.

While visitors may come from outside the area, the focus remains on ensuring that the scale and operation of agritourism activities are compatible with the local setting and contribute positively to the community's agricultural vitality and sense of place.

It prioritizes social and environmental responsibility by recognizing the capacity of local infrastructure such as roads, utilities, and community services to sustain tourism without disruption or the need to increase capacity.

Low Impact Agritourism encourages the volume of visitors be thoughtfully considered so as to be in-line with the capacity of participating farms to host visitors, while maintaining agricultural operations as the primary purpose of the business.

Low Impact Agritourism does not require widening roads, building hotels, or adding new commercial services such as gas stations; rather, it functions within the existing scope and rhythm of the farming community.

Low Impact Agritourism can include activities such as u-picks, farm tours, farm-to-table dinners, open farm days, and other gatherings, though it can encompass a range of events depending on the character and ingenuity of individual farms.

These events are generally organized and promoted directly by farmers or local producers, though they may also involve partnerships with community organizations or tour operators that help with collective marketing, visitor coordination, or scheduling.

This approach allows farmers to focus on production while ensuring that agritourism remains rooted in education, connection to the land, and stewardship, while also supporting the financial sustainability of small farms.

Commercial success does not depend on drawing tens of thousands of visitors but instead gains strength through supporting regional family farms and fostering meaningful engagement between producers and the public.

High Impact Agritourism

High Impact Agritourism describes larger-scale or higher-intensity agritourism activities that generate significant visitor traffic, require substantial infrastructure, or create broader regional impacts related to sound, traffic, or land use.

While these activities may be part of regionally coordinated tourism efforts that promote a specific product or destination, what distinguishes them as high impact is not the collaboration itself, but the scale and concentration of visitors and the infrastructure required to support them.

Local agencies may also actively invest in regional infrastructure and tourism development to accommodate a higher volume of visitors.

High Impact Agritourism requires more attention to sound and traffic impacts, attendance capacity, size of agricultural parcels, and public safety ingress and egress.

The planning and development surrounding High Impact Agritourism can lead to hotels, restaurants, and traffic management to support the increased flow of visitors traveling along rural roads and through agricultural valleys.

High Impact Agritourism focuses on economic growth and visitor volume while Low Impact Agritourism centers on local sustainability and small farm resilience

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